

keeping illicit drugs out of the country.

“This search training facility represents a key component in the vital task of protecting the community at the border,” she said. “It can be used to train up to 20 cargo search officers at a time.

“Today’s criminals use hi-tech methods to conceal prohibited goods from authorities. This equipment will help Customs to stay ahead.”

The training facility is similar to those operating in Canada and Britain. The centre conducts courses on contemporary ship search techniques, procedures and operations; conducts reviews and certification of trained officers; liaises with health and safety regulators and assists in identifying appropriate equipment and emerging technology.

Quite a number of regional officers have already completed the

training course. All are to remain available for ship search duties for at least two years and can be deployed to other regions to supplement local staff.

Frank Malkoun, who has had extensive border experience, is the inaugural Manager of the Centre of Excellence. Frank, and some selected officers from the four regions, attended ship search training courses in Canada and Britain before our centre opened.

## Marble table-top scam smashed

By Les Jones,  
National Director, Border Division, Australian Customs Service

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*Customs latest weapon in the fight against illicit drugs is a machine so sensitive that it can show existence of drugs where other indicators suggest otherwise. Here is an example.*

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Customs officers recently identified some marble-topped tables from South East Asia that they had strong reason to suspect were being used to import heroin. Customs new “ionscan” machine confirmed their suspicions but an X-ray of the table tops contradicted the ionscan results.

An X-ray showed nothing because the marble was too dense. So the officers drilled a hole through the marble and pulled the drill bit out, but there was nothing there. That was two technologies giving one finding and another, newer technology, giving a contrary result.

In the finish, the officers made a decision to destroy the marble top table. So they smashed it and there were the layers of heroin—23 kilograms all told—hidden inside the

reconstituted marble tops of the tables. The smugglers had encased the heroin with special plastic so that when our officers pulled the drill bit out, it came out clean.

While that is a very good example of where the ionscan is providing some excellent advice and guidance, I don’t think anything is ever going to replace the need for Customs officers to make their own judgements—which they did in this case despite the X-ray and the drill bit providing negative results.

The ionscan is another useful tool that officers can use to support their judgements.

